



BOARD OF GOVERNORS

President's Quarterly Progress Report: July - September 2018

1. Board Matters

The next meeting of the Audit Committee will be held on November 22, 2018, to be followed by an Executive Committee meeting planned for January 2019. Both meetings will be held by teleconference.

I am delighted to welcome Ambassador Amina Mohamed, EGH, CAV, Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Education, Kenya to the Board, as the regional representative for Africa. Warm appreciation is extended to the Hon Unity Dow, Minister of International Affairs and Cooperation, Botswana, the former representative, for her support and guidance.

I also extend a warm welcome to Ms Louise Ellis, MBE, Head of the Commonwealth Unit, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) as the UK representative on the COL Board. It is my pleasure to place on record our gratitude to Mr. Steve Hillier, the outgoing member, for his valuable contributions. I had occasion to meet Ms Ellis and Mr Hillier during a recent visit to London.

The next annual meeting of the Board of Governors will take place on June 26 and 27, 2019 and we look forward to welcoming you to Vancouver.

2. General

A significant development during this quarter was the announcement made by the Rt Hon Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister of New Zealand, at the Pacific Islands Forum held in Nauru. Announcing a substantial package for education, the Prime Minister said, 'We are pleased to be able to draw on the considerable expertise of the University of the South Pacific and the Commonwealth of Learning to increase access to high quality secondary and tertiary education in the Pacific.'

COL organises regional meetings of Focal Points at the mid-point of its strategic plan. You will recall that the first meeting was organised for Pacific Focal Points in Fiji, ahead of the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers. The second meeting for the Caribbean region was held in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Information, Jamaica. The Minister, Hon Ruel Reid, gave the inaugural address,

appreciating COL's contributions and sharing his vision for a holistic approach to education. Nine of the 12 Member States were present.

The Focal Points meeting for Africa and the Mediterranean was organised in collaboration with the Ministry of Tertiary Education, Research, Science and Technology, Botswana and the Botswana Open University (BOU). The Minister, Hon Ngaka Ngaka in his opening remarks thanked COL for its substantial support, especially for the transition of Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning into BOU. I signed a Memorandum of Agreement with the Vice Chancellor of BOU, Dr Daniel Tau, under which the COL-supported Southern African Development Community-Centre for Distance Education will be hosted by the university.

The Focal Points meetings are very important events in the life of COL. Focal Points, nominated by Ministers of Education, are our voice and visibility in the field. The objectives of these meetings are to i) understand the priorities of each Member State to effectively address these; ii) present reports of what we have done in each country; iii) remind Focal Points of COL's purpose and programmes; and iv) promote Commonwealth-wide cooperation. It was clear from the discussions that Member States will continue to need support in education and skills development, with a greater emphasis on innovation and lifelong learning.

I would also like to inform you that the Vice President, Dr K Balasubramanian will leave COL at the end of the year due to compelling family circumstances. The recruitment for his successor was initiated by commissioning an executive search firm to assist with the process and by advertising internationally, including in *The Economist*. I will communicate the decision as soon as we have made an appointment.

2.1 President's Activities

Following The Gambia's return to the Commonwealth, I visited Banjul to request the government to re-join COL as a contributing member. The Gambia has two ministries of education. The Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology is responsible for liaising with COL. I met the Hon Claudiana Cole, who heads the Ministry of Basic & Secondary Education and was pleased to find that The Gambia is eager to optimise its membership of the Commonwealth and make up for the lost time. They have since paid the annual contribution and nominated a Focal Point. COL for its part, responded swiftly and organised teacher training activities at The Gambia College and a workshop on open and distance learning (ODL) at the University of The Gambia. While there, I delivered lectures on teacher development and ODL policy at these two institutions.

In July, I was invited by the Open University of Hong Kong to deliver a keynote on 'Global Trends in Open Educational Resources (OER): What is the Future?' at an International Conference on Open and Innovative Education. I also facilitated a workshop on the 'Development, Use and Assessment of OER' which attracted participants from several Asian countries. The Association of Caribbean Higher Education Administrators invited me to present a keynote at their annual conference in Port of Spain, Trinidad and

Tobago. I used this occasion to meet the Hon Dr Lovell Francis, Minister of State for Education, who was familiar with COL's work, particularly Aptus.

The Commonwealth Secretariat (COMSEC) and the Commonwealth Foundation invited COL as a partner to organise the 35th Commonwealth Diplomats' Induction Programme in London. This is an important forum for presenting COL to London diplomats and for keeping key stakeholders engaged. The Secretary-General, the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland, QC, despite her demanding schedule, always makes time for COL. I met the Hon Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN, who expressed interest in COL's innovative approaches in financial literacy, secondary schooling and Aptus. I briefed HE Philip Parham, Commonwealth Envoy, FCO and was informed that our future funding will come from FCO rather than the Department for International Development. This was also an opportunity to call on the High Commissioners of Australia, New Zealand and Nigeria as well as the deputy High Commissioner of Canada.

The meetings with the various ministers, officials, partners and stakeholders foster closer collaboration and a better alignment of our work with national and regional priorities. However, it is not always possible to be physically present. The COL report to the COMSEC Board of Governors was presented through Skype, and a video presentation sent for a major conference in Pretoria, worked well.

Within COL, the performance reviews for staff were completed in a timely manner and remunerations awarded accordingly. Staff and families enjoyed the annual 'Meet and Greet' event held in July. Following Board guidance, we have established two Task Forces: the one on 'Resilience and Education' has already started its work in Dominica; the second on 'Innovation' has conceptualised a framework for exploring and implementing new ideas.

3. Programme

This quarter marked the start of the second half of the six-year Strategic Plan. The introspection facilitated by the external evaluation and the direction from the Board, assisted staff to refine their approaches and targets.

3.1 Education Sector

3.1.1 Open/Innovative Schooling

The south-south collaboration between institutions in Bangladesh and India resulted in a robust quality assurance system for the Bangladesh Open University (BOU). The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), India led the quality audit and peer review process at the BOU Open School. BOU will conduct a similar exercise at NIOS.

Based on a request from the Ministry of Education and Training, Vanuatu, COL helped develop a draft national policy on Open and Distance Education. This is now poised to go through various approval processes.

At the Zambian College of Distance Education, nearly 2000 learning resources in 14 subjects have been developed to strengthen the curriculum in secondary schools.

3.1.2 *Teacher Education*

In partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and Kenya Institute of Special Education, COL conducted a stakeholder forum on inclusive education in secondary schools, where participants identified strategies for school-based teacher development.

The National Teachers' Institute, Kaduna, launched the Advanced Diploma in Environmental Education, also known as 'Green Teacher Nigeria' which aims to inculcate environmental concerns among children from the early stages. COL supported an eFacilitation training for the roll-out of this programme.

In collaboration with the Department of Basic Education and the University of Fort Hare, South Africa, COL organised a four-day planning forum for the professional development of teachers in digital learning.

3.1.3 *Higher Education*

Programme design workshops were conducted at the University of Malawi and the University of eSwatini (formerly Swaziland) for 65 faculty members. These workshops laid the foundation for implementing a holistic model which includes quality assurance, learner support and employability in universities.

The University of Namibia completed the development of four online LLB modules which are ready for launch. The facilitators have completed the *Designing and Teaching Online Courses* programme through the University of Mauritius, another example of institutional collaboration.

In South Africa, COL facilitated a meeting of the regional quality assurance Community of Practice (CoP). Quality guidelines developed by the CoP have been implemented by the participating institutions from seven SADC countries.

3.1.4 *Virtual University for Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC)*

COL organised a stakeholder consultation in Dominica to identify a roadmap for building resilience in education. Stakeholders included representatives from the Ministry of Education, Dominica State College, the Office of Disaster Preparedness, local radio stations and a regional telecommunications provider. HE Hubert Charles played a key role in facilitating this multi-stakeholder consultation.

In partnership with the University of Guyana, UNICEF and CARICOM, COL organised a two-day workshop to address the issue of boys' underperformance in education. The resulting communique outlines concrete steps for empowering boys, especially in remote regions.

COL supported the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development and the Seychelles Institute of Teacher Education to train 210 teachers in the use of ICTs for teaching-learning.

The Solomon Islands National University has launched two programmes as part of its 'Second Chance Education' project to bring out-of-school primary and secondary learners into the educational mainstream.

3.1.5 GIRLS Inspire

The Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC), Pakistan, trained 1161 girls in various skills. SPARC develops linkages with employers and financial institutions to generate job placements and entrepreneurship opportunities for girls and women.

Bedari, another COL partner, used its networks in Pakistan to create support among parliamentarians and decision makers to amend the Child Marriage Bill and raise the age of marriage from 16 to 18 years. More than 700 community members participated in events to raise awareness about the negative impact of child, early and forced marriage (CEFM).

Kiota Women Health and Development Organisation, Tanzania, collaborated with two radio stations to sensitise the community on CEFM. During this quarter, 652 women and girls were trained in life skills, financial literacy and entrepreneurship.

3.2 Skills Sector

3.2.1 Technical and Vocational Skills Development (TVSD)

At the request of the TVET Council Barbados, COL supported a workshop on 'Greening TVET' for eight institutions, which resulted in strategies for integrating sustainable development.

COL is helping the National Centre for Persons with Disabilities in Trinidad and Tobago to develop a Caribbean Vocational Qualification in Food Preparation for persons with disabilities.

The Department of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology, Papua New Guinea is working with COL to establish a mechanism for strengthening flexible and blended TVET.

COL assisted the Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Bangladesh to integrate gender mainstreaming. In addition, workshops were conducted at the organisation to build capacity in OER.

3.2.2 *Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F)*

The L3F programme offered by Siaya SEED Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCO) is currently reaching over 5000 members. A financial literacy course enabled 1851 new borrowers to access loans, a 41% increase over a one-year period. To scale up the project, SACCO collaborated with Kenya Union of Savings and Credit Cooperative Societies, resulting in additional capacity building opportunities and tax waivers from the government.

L3F partners Makerere University and Agricultural Innovation Brokerage Association in Uganda expanded the mobile learning platform *m-Omulimisa*, enabling 20400 participants across six districts to access quality learning resources in agriculture at no cost. The L3F team engaged with the Uganda Parliamentarians Forum to discuss policies for enhancing food and nutrition security and L3F was offered as a viable model for addressing the challenges of declining agricultural productivity.

In Antigua & Barbuda, 34 women farmers were trained in water management and seed conservation.

A COL-supported financial literacy course was completed by 300 learners, mainly from the fisheries sector in Tonga.

3.2.3 *Technology-Enabled Learning (TEL)*

An updated version of '[Understanding Open Educational Resources](#)' was launched online. Within a month, 2577 (50% female) learners registered, of whom 763 have successfully completed the course.

The Open University of Sri Lanka trained teachers from 39 schools in the Commonwealth Digital Education Leadership Training in Action (C-DELTA). The C-DELTA platform has registered 988 learners from 23 countries.

A workshop at the Uganda Management Institute trained staff members in the development of blended courses.

A draft policy on TEL was developed at the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, Kenya, a new partner for COL.

3.2.4 *OER for Skills Development*

Hands-on workshops to train master trainers in mobile application development were conducted in Bangladesh, in collaboration with the Centre for Mass Education in

Science and the Women's Development Centre, Sri Lanka. The focus was on reaching out to underprivileged and marginalised girls.

3.3 Cross-cutting Theme

3.3.1 Gender

COL supported BOU to complete a series of gender sensitisation workshops in preparation for an institutional gender audit.

NIOS conducted a needs analysis and planning workshop to develop a blueprint for a 'Gender Green Teacher' programme, which combines gender and environment-related training for teachers.

COL has initiated an ambitious project in Mchinji district, Malawi to reduce gender inequality by enhancing women's participation in the labour force, increasing girls' access to secondary education and strengthening maternal and child health.

With the expertise of Wageningen University, Netherlands, a framework for Social Protection Literacy for the Pacific has been developed. The programme aims to leverage ICTs to provide timely and relevant information about available social services, especially for the safety of women.

3.4 eLearning for International Organisations (eLIO)

eLIO is delivering courses in programme management and communications to 306 staff of the World Bank, UNHCR, International Labour Organisation and Council of Europe. A 100% successful completion rate was achieved in a recent cohort with the World Bank. A one-year extension agreement was signed with UNHCR to continue the delivery of the Operational Data Management programme to its staff.

The pilot for 'Deliver for Good' course developed for Women Deliver (an international NGO), concluded with 240 registered and 187 active participants from around the world.

3.5 Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA)

Netaji Subhas Open University, India has enrolled more than 1200 students in seven CEMCA-supported courses. A significant feature of these courses is the integration of employability and the use of blended learning. Bilaspur University, India has adopted an institutional OER policy and 50 faculty members were trained in blended learning and OER. The University of Hyderabad (UoH) e-Learning Centre launched two online courses and trained 70 professors in designing digital learning materials.

CEMCA supported UoH and Osmania University to offer a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) on 'Life Skills for Engineers' in which over 5000 participants registered,

40% used mobile devices for learning and 14% successfully completed the course and received blockchain generated certificates. The use of the MOOC-mobile interface and blockchain certification are COL-led innovations. CEMCA supported the Open University of Sri Lanka to develop a MOOC on 'Adopting OER and Open Educational Practices'.

The Chhattisgarh State Skill Development Authority was assisted by CEMCA to build the capacity of vocational master trainers. CEMCA has launched video-based content for training youth in automobile repair through the Indian Institute of Skills Development. In partnership with Tata Institute of Social Sciences, CEMCA has trained 429 marginalised youth in three slums of Delhi. Of these, 145 youth have successfully transitioned to formal vocational training.

3.6 Regional Centres

3.6.1 Southern African Development Community - Centre for Distance Education (SADC-CDE)

With support from SADC-CDE, COL conducted a workshop on technology-enabled learning for BOU. COL supported the development of a strategic plan for SADC-CDE aligned to its work. This was approved at their Advisory Board meeting held in September.

3.6.2 Research and Training Institute for Distance and Open Learning (RETRIDOL)

RETRIDOL organised workshops in The University of The Gambia and the University of Ghana to build capacity in ODL. COL also supported the publication of an issue of the West African Journal of Flexible Learning.

3.6.3 Pacific Centre for Flexible and Open Learning for Development (PACFOLD)

PACFOLD conducted training workshops on OER and elearning in Kiribati, Samoa and Solomon Islands.

3.7 Vice President's Activities

The Vice President organised the Focal Points meetings in Kingston and Gaborone. Consultations with key stakeholders were held in the wings of these events. In Jamaica, he met with the senior management of our new partners, the Caribbean Maritime University and National Centre for Educational Leadership to identify areas of collaboration: skills for the blue economy, resilience management and educational leadership. He also had discussions with the Rural Agricultural Development Authority (RADA) to strengthen the L3F programme in the Caribbean. In Botswana, he met senior staff to develop concrete activities for strengthening the systems in the newly-established BOU. He presented the scope of L3F and non-formal learning at a meeting organised by the SADC-CDE in Gaborone.

In response to the recommendations of the mid-term evaluation, the Vice President led the development of a new set of outcomes and indicators to bridge the gap between outputs and the long-term outcomes. The eight new outcome statements have been incorporated into the eLogframe system and will guide the programme work in the final three years of the Strategic Plan 2015-2021.

Dr Bala also co-authored two invited papers on '[Learning through social media: a Promethean gift?](#)' and '[Mobile based learning for sustainable livelihoods: gender and pedagogy in the Life Long Learning for Farmers programme in India](#)' published in the journal *CSI Transactions on ICT*, September 2018 issue.

4. Stakeholder Relations

4.1 Member Governments Support

In 2017-2018, \$12.5 million was received from 47 countries. This is the highest level of member government funding and the largest number of contributing countries to date. Arrears from Nigeria also contributed to the increase.

COL is forecasting contributions of \$10.8 million from Member States in 2018-2019. Invoices have been sent out to almost all Commonwealth Member States.

At the end of this quarter, contributions have been received from 14 countries (as compared to 16 countries during the first quarter of the previous year). A complete listing is provided at Section 5.1.

4.2 Focal Points

We welcomed the following new Focal Points:

Bangladesh – Mr. Syed Ali Reja, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Education

Fiji – Ms Alison Burchell, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts

The Gambia – Mr Anthony Mendy, Director, Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology

Guyana – Ms Patrice La Fleur, Secretary-General, Guyana National Commission for UNESCO

Kiribati – Ms Bwakura Metutera Timeon, Secretary, Ministry of Education

Lesotho – Mr Monaheng Mohale, Director, Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre

Mauritius – Mr Megavarnen Varaden, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research

Trinidad and Tobago – Mrs Amia Kimoy Conrad Christopher, Head of Teaching and Teacher Development Division, Ministry of Education

4.3 Congratulatory Letters

Seven congratulatory letters were sent to newly appointed heads of governments, ministers of education and senior officials.

5. Finances

5.1 Revenue

COL has received \$4.9 million in voluntary contributions from member governments towards the budget for 2018-2019, the same level received at the quarter ended September 30, 2017.

The 14 countries are:

Belize – \$39,123; Cameroon – \$38,927; Canada – \$2.6 million; Dominica – \$6,564; Grenada – \$6,566; India – \$1.5 million; Mauritius – \$100,000 (a 67% increase from the previous year); Mozambique – \$64,365; Namibia – \$128,000; Nauru – \$6,400; Saint Kitts & Nevis – \$39,123; South Africa – \$250,000; Trinidad & Tobago – \$96,000; and Tuvalu – \$13,041.

A three-year funding agreement for \$7.8 million was signed with the Government of Canada for the period 2018-2021. Three-year funding agreements are also underway with Australia and New Zealand.

COL is forecasting that additional contributions of \$2.3 million from grants and fee-for-service activities will be received. Deferred revenue of \$.7 million is available for recognition over the fiscal year, as ongoing activities related to the 'Reaching the Unreached' and 'CEFM' projects are completed. General operating support of USD300,000 was received from Hewlett Foundation, the first tranche of a two-year grant.

During this quarter, COL recognised close to \$350,000 in revenues from grants and fee-for-services.

5.2 Cash Flow

At September 30, 2018, COL held over \$14 million in cash and cash equivalents. This level of cash and cash equivalents enables COL to meet operational costs and maintain a positive cash flow until outstanding contributions are received over the year.

COL holds an internally restricted cash reserve of \$10 million to provide a source of funds for unexpected expenses and shortfalls in funding, if needed. The cash reserve provision represents 12 months of operating costs.

5.3 Expenditures

In the first quarter, approximately \$2.7 million was spent or committed to meet programme and organisational management activities, staff costs and office expenses. This amount comprises 22% of the annual budget of \$12.5 million approved for 2018-2019 (as compared to expenditures of 28% of the annual budget for 2017-2018 during the same period).

COL is committed to attaining a minimum spend of 95% of the annual budget for this year.

6. Human Resources

6.1 Staff Changes

6.1.1 Departures

Dr Alison Mead Richardson completed her nine-year tenure on September 15, 2018 as Education Specialist: Technical & Vocational Skills Development.

6.1.2 New Staff

Ms Teresa Neal from New Zealand joined COL on October 1, 2018 as Education Specialist: Technical & Vocational Skills Development.

6.1.2 Recruitment

Recruitment is in progress for the following positions:

- Vice President
- Education Specialist: Gender
- Education Specialist: Open Schooling
- Learning and Business Development Manager

Two new positions have been advertised:

- Adviser: Skills
- Stakeholder Relations Manager

7. Information Technology & Knowledge Management

A [Data Protection Policy](#) has been adopted to assure the global public that COL, through its online systems, collects minimal data to fulfil its mission and mandate and does not share this data with any third party. We now have a corporate cyber security framework in place which is updated regularly and reviewed every quarter. The internal data capture systems in support of eLogframes have been further refined.

A new prototype of Aptus that allows more users to connect to the device has been developed and continues to generate interest, especially among small states. Content for secondary schools in Portuguese has been uploaded on Aptus and deployed in Mozambique. A MOOC for practising farmers delivered through basic cell phones in their local language, was offered by our partner, the University of Agricultural Sciences, Raichur, India. More than 4000 farmers have registered for this course on rice and cotton crops.

8. Ninth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning (PCF9)

You will be pleased to note that the next PCF will be held in collaboration with the Open University, UK (OUUK), in Edinburgh during September 9-12, 2019. This will mark the 30th and 50th anniversaries of COL and OUUK respectively. The theme of 'Innovations for Quality Education and Lifelong Learning' will explore four sub-themes: Employability; Equity and Inclusion; Opening Up Education; and Technology. Education for Girls and Youth will be two special interest areas. Details can be found at www.pcf9.org. Lord David Puttnam has very kindly agreed to deliver the Asa Briggs Lecture, a special feature of each PCF.

9. Communications

COL featured in 28 external media stories and 24 news stories on our website during this quarter. Our social media presence continues to grow steadily in terms of followers and engagements. The Facebook following has increased from 132,000 this June to over 160,000 by the end of September. Similarly, the number of Instagram followers has grown by 112%. The Twitter following was up by 126% with 98,500 impressions. In addition, the GIRLS Inspire project recorded 14,946 Twitter impressions. The COL website is being regularly updated with news and content largely focused on engaging the stakeholder.

10. Visitors to COL

Recent visitors to COL include:

- Her Excellency Janice Miller, High Commissioner for Jamaica to Canada

- Dr Michael Vaughan, Honorary Consul for Jamaica in British Columbia
- Dr Mangala Sunder, National Coordinator, SWAYAM PRABHA MOOCs project, India.

11. Publications/Resources

Recent publications and resources of note are available at <http://oasis.col.org>:

- [Connections, July 2018, Vol. 23, No. 2](#)
- [Journal of Learning for Development, Vol. 5, No. 2](#)
- [Mid-term Outcome Evaluation of Technology-Enabled Learning Initiative](#)
- [National Open Educational Resources Policy for Malta](#)
- [Preventing Child, Early and Forced Marriage \(CEFM\) through Open Distance and Technology-Based Education: Progress Report #4](#)
- [Speeches and presentations](#)

All currencies are in Canadian dollars unless otherwise indicated.

*Professor Asha S. Kanwar
President & Chief Executive Officer
October 13, 2018*